

## REMARKS

In response to the above Office Action, the claims have been amended to more clearly distinguish them from the cited prior art, to avoid improper multiple dependency, to delete improper "preferably" claims, to use proper Markush language, for clarity and, generally, to place the claims in more traditional U.S. format.

Independent claims 1 and 3 have been amended to recite that the methane is "used only as an initial alkane" in the claimed process. Support for this can be found on page 5, lines 13 and 14 as well as line 32. In addition, Examples 2, 3, and 5 show methane only being used as the initial alkane contacted with the metal catalyst.

Claim 7 has been cancelled and rewritten as new claim 20. Support for this can be found on page 5, lines 10-12.

In the Office Action the Examiner rejected claims 1-5 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) for being anticipated by WO 01/04077 to Basset, hereafter WO'077.

However, WO'077 only discloses a process where methane with at least one other starting alkane (A) is contacted with a metal catalyst. The other starting alkane (A) comprises at least two carbon atoms. See, page 3, lines 7-10 and lines 14-16 of WO'077. The reference never discloses or suggests contacting methane used only as an initial alkane with a metal catalyst for producing ethane as set forth in claims 1 and 3.

Accordingly, it is submitted that neither of claims 1 or 3 nor claims 2, 4-6 and 8-20 dependent therefrom can be considered to be anticipated by WO'077. Its withdrawal as a ground of rejection of the claims under §102(b) is therefore requested.

It is believed claims 1-6 and 8-20 are in condition for allowance.

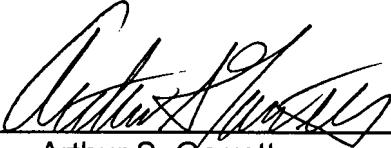
In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and reexamination of this application and the timely allowance of the pending claims.

Please grant any extensions of time required to enter this response and charge any additional required fees to our deposit account 06-0916.

Respectfully submitted,

FINNEGAN, HENDERSON, FARABOW,  
GARRETT & DUNNER, L.L.P.

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By:   
Arthur S. Garrett  
Reg. No. 20,338  
Tel: 202-408-4091

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